Perfect Blue

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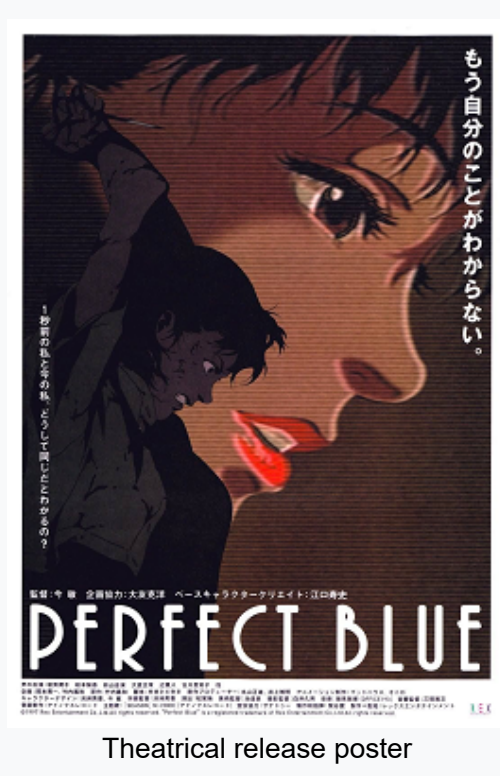
For the live-action film and television series, respectively, see Perfect Blue: Yume Nara Samete and Perfect Blue (TV series).

Perfect Blue


もう自分のことがわからない。
1秒前の私と今の私、どうして同じだとわかるの？
PERFECT BLUE

Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Satoshi Kon
Screenplay by	Sadayuki Murai
Based on	*Perfect Blue: Complete Metamorphosis* by Yoshikazu Takeuchi
Produced by	Masao Maruyama Hitomi Nakagaki Yoshihisa Ishihara Yutaka Tōgō Hiroaki Inoue
Starring	Junko Iwao Rica Matsumoto Shiho Niiyama Masaaki Okura Shinpachi Tsuji Emiko Furukawa
Cinematography	Hisao Shirai
Edited by	Harutoshi Ogata
Music by	Masahiro Ikumi
Production company	Madhouse
Distributed by	Rex Entertainment
Release dates	August 5, 1997 (Fantasia) February 28, 1998 (Japan)
Running time	81 minutes
Country	Japan
Language	Japanese
Budget	¥90 million[1] (US$830,442)[2]
Box office	$810,203[3] €572,669 (Italy rerelease)[4]

Perfect Blue (Japanese: パーフェクトブルー, Hepburn: *Pāfekuto Burū*) is a 1997 Japanese animated psychological thriller film[5][6] directed by Satoshi Kon.[7] It is loosely based on the novel *Perfect Blue: Complete Metamorphosis* (パーフェクトブルー：完全変態, *Pāfekuto Burū: Kanzen Hentai*) by Yoshikazu Takeuchi, with a screenplay by Sadayuki Murai. Featuring the voices of Junko Iwao, Rica Matsumoto, Shiho Niiyama, Masaaki Okura, Shinpachi Tsuji and Emiko Furukawa, the plot follows a member of a Japanese idol group who retires from music to pursue an acting career. As she becomes a victim of stalking by her obsessive fan, gruesome murders take place, and she begins losing her grip on reality.[8] The film deals with the blurring of the line between fantasy and reality, a commonly found theme in Kon's other works, such as *Millennium Actress* (2001), *Paranoia Agent* (2004), and *Paprika* (2006).[9]

The film has garnered critical acclaim and is now considered a masterpiece of animation, being voted one of the best anime films of all time.[10][11][12]

Plot [edit]

Mima Kirigoe decides to leave the J-pop idol group CHAM! to become a full-time actress. Many of her fans are dismayed by her change from a clean-cut image, particularly an obsessive fan, Me-Mania, who begins stalking her. Following directions from a fan letter, Mima discovers a website called "Mima's Room" comprising public diary entries written from her perspective, recording her daily life and private thoughts in great detail. She confides in her manager, former pop idol Rumi Hidaka, about the site, but Rumi advises her to ignore it.

Mima lands a minor role in the television detective drama *Double Bind*; however, her agent, Tadokoro, lobbies the producers of *Double Bind* and succeeds in securing Mima a larger part, though her new role requires her to film a rape scene. Despite Rumi's objections, Mima accepts the role, although filming the scene proves acutely distressing. Between the ongoing stresses of filming *Double Bind*, her lingering regret over leaving CHAM!, and the paranoia she experiences from being stalked, Mima is distressed about her double life and begins to suffer from psychosis. She especially struggles to distinguish real life from her acting pursuits, and is repeatedly visited by an apparition of her former idol self, who claims to be "the real Mima."

A string of murders is committed, all against people who have been involved in Mima's acting career in some respect. Mima finds evidence in her closet suggesting her to be the prime suspect. Her increasing mental instability makes her doubt her own memories and innocence, as she vaguely recalls brutally murdering photographer Murano after he implored her to allow him to take naked photos of her. Mima manages to finish shooting *Double Bind*, the final scene of which reveals that her character killed and assumed the identity of her sister due to trauma-induced dissociative identity disorder. After the filming staff have left the studio, Me-Mania, acting on e-mailed instructions from "the real Mima" to "eliminate the impostor," corners Mima and attempts to rape and kill her, but Mima bludgeons him with a hammer and escapes. Later, Me-Mania is murdered by "the real Mima" for failing to kill Mima.

Rumi finds Mima backstage and takes her to her home. Mima discovers that Rumi's bedroom is a replica of her own and realizes that Rumi is the one behind "Mima's Room," the serial murders, and the doppelgänger that manipulated Me-Mania: Displeased by Mima's retirement from the idol industry, Rumi developed an alternate personality of the "real Mima," now seeking to destroy and replace her in order to redeem her image. Rumi pursues Mima through the city, culminating in Mima accidentally incapacitating Rumi with a mirror shard during a struggle. Rumi stumbles into the street and the path of an oncoming truck; hallucinating the headlights as stage lights, she smiles and poses instead of moving out of the way, but Mima manages to save her from being run over at the last moment.

Sometime later, Mima, now a well-known actress, visits Rumi in a mental institution. Rumi's doctor says Rumi still believes she is a pop idol most of the time. Mima says she has learned a lot from her experiences with Rumi. As Mima leaves the hospital, she overhears two nurses, who recognize her but conclude that she must be a look-alike, as the real Mima Kirigoe would have no reason to visit a mental institution. As Mima enters her car, she smiles at herself in the rear-view mirror before declaring, "No, I'm the real thing."

Cast [edit]

Character	Japanese	English[13]
Mima Kirigoe (霧越 未麻, *Kirigoe Mima*)	Junko Iwao	Ruby Marlowe[14]
Rumi (ルミ)	Rica Matsumoto	Wendee Lee[15]
Tadokoro (田所)	Shinpachi Tsuji	Gil Starberry
Mamoru Uchida (Me-Mania) (内田 守, *Uchida Mamoru*)	Masaaki Ōkura	Bob Marx[16]
Tejima (手嶋)	Yōsuke Akimoto	–
Takao Shibuya (渋谷 貴雄, *Shibuya Takao*)	Yoku Shioya	–
Sakuragi (桜木)	Hideyuki Hori	Sparky Thornton[17]
Eri Ochiai (落合 恵理, *Ochiai Eri*)	Emi Shinohara	–
Murano (村野)	Masashi Ebara	–
Director (監督, *Kantoku*)	Kiyoyuki Yanada	–
Yada (矢田)	Tōru Furusawa	–
Yukiko (雪子)	Emiko Furukawa	–
Rei (レイ)	Shiho Niiyama	–
Tadashi Doi (土居 正, *Doi Tadashi*)	Akio Suyama	–
Cham Manager	–	–

The following actors in the English adaptation are listed in the credits without specification to their respective roles: James Lyon, Frank Buck, David Lucas, Elliot Reynolds, Kermit Beachwood, Sam Strong, Carol Stanzione, Ty Webb, Billy Regan, Dari Mackenzie, George C. Cole, Syd Fontana, Sven Nosgard, Bob Marx, Devon Michaels, Robert Wicks and Mattie Rando.[18]

Analysis [edit]

In an analysis of *Perfect Blue* and Kon's other works, professor Susan Napier states that "*Perfect Blue* announces its preoccupation with perception, identity, voyeurism, and performance – especially in relation to the female – right from its opening sequence. The perception of reality cannot be trusted, with the visual set up only to not be reality, especially as the psychodrama heights towards the climax."[19] Napier also sees themes related to pop idols and their performances as impacting the gaze and the issue of their roles. Mima's madness results from her own subjectivity and attacks on her identity. The ties to Alfred Hitchcock's work are broken with the murder of her male controllers.[19] *Otaku* describes the film as a "critique of the consumer society of contemporary Japan."[19][Note 1]

Production [edit]

This film was Satoshi Kon's first directorial effort. Masao Maruyama, a producer at Madhouse at the time, appreciated Kon's work on the OVA *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* and contacted him to ask if he would be interested in directing in the fall of 1994.[20][21] The original author, Yoshikazu Takeuchi, allegedly first planned a live-action film based on his novel. However, due to funding difficulties, it was downgraded to direct-to-video and then direct-to-video animation.[22][23][24] When Kon received the initial offer, it was for an OVA project, so he made *Perfect Blue* as a video animation.[25] Then, it was decided to be released as a movie in a hurry just before its completion.[26] This work was originally made as a video animation for a narrow market, so it was expected to disappear as soon as a few people talked about it.[25][27][28] The fact that such a work was treated as a film, invited to many film festivals around the world, and released as a package in many countries was unexpected for those involved.[25][27][28] Psychological horror was not a mainstream genre in Japanese animation, and there was no precedent for it at the time, so it would normally have been rejected.[22][23][27]

By the time Kon was offered the job, the title *Perfect Blue* and the content, a story about a B-class idol and a perverted fan had already been set.[25][27][28] He had not read the original novel and only read the script for the film, which was said to be close to the original and was never used in the final film.[27][29] There is no play-within-a-play in the original story, nor is there a motif of blurring the boundary between dream and reality.[29] The first plot was a simple splatter/psycho-horror story about an idol girl that is attacked by a perverted fan who cannot tolerate her image change, and there were also many depictions of bleeding, so it was not suitable for Kon who does not like horror or idols.[23][24][29] Kon said that if he were free to make a plan, he would never have thought of such a setting.[29] This genre was overused, having already been dealt with in various works such as *Se7en*, *Basic Instinct* and *The Silence of the Lambs* and was also something that anime was not good at.[21][23][27] Since most of the works in that genre pursue how perverted or crazy the perpetrators, the murderers, are, Kon focused on "how the inner world of the protagonist, the victim, is broken by being targeted by the stalker" in order to outsmart the audience.[27] On the other hand, the play within a play, *Double Bind*, is more like a parody than a straight psycho-horror, and he made it with the intention of criticizing Japanese TV dramas that are easily made by imitating Hollywood fads immediately.[27]

Kon decided to take on the role of director because he was attracted by the allure of directing for the first time, and because the original author allowed him to change the story as he liked as long as he kept three things in mind to make the film work: the main character is a B-grade idol, she has a rabid fan (stalker), and it is a horror film.[23][24][29] Kon took some elements from the original work, such as the uniquely Japanese existence of idols, the "otaku" fans that surround them, and the stalkers that have become more radical, and came up with as many ideas as possible with the scriptwriter, Sadayuki Murai, with the intention of using them to create a completely new story.[21][23][24] To find the film's core motif,[21][23][24] Kon came up with the motif of two things that should have a "borderline", such as "dream and reality", "memory and fact", and "oneself and others", becoming borderless and blending together, based on the short film *Magnetic Rose* (from *Memories*), for which he had written a script, and the suspended manga *Opus*.[27][28] The concept of "memory and fact" in the plot was inspired by the album *Sim City* by Susumu Hirasawa.[30] He said, "This album is like a city that was suddenly created with a high degree of modernity without any evolutionary process".[30] In the meantime, he came up with the idea that "a character more like 'me' than 'I', the protagonist, to the people around 'me' " is created on the Internet without 'my' knowledge".[21][23][24] The character is "the past me" for the protagonist, and this "other me" that should have existed only on the Internet has materialized due to external factors (the consciousness of the fans who want the protagonist to be like that) and internal factors (the protagonist's regret that she might have been more comfortable in the past). And then the composition that the character and the protagonist herself confronted emerged.[23][24] It was only then that he became convinced that this work could be established as his own video work.[23][24] Kon decided to interpret the original story above as a story about an idol girl who was broken down by a sudden change in her environment or by a stalker who targets her, and wrote a completely new script with Sadayuki Murai.[23][24] Initially, Murai wrote the first draft of the script, and Kon added or removed ideas from it. They spent a lot of time discussing, and many of the ideas came out of that.[24] Next, Kon wrote all the storyboards, where he also made changes to dialogue and other elements.[21][24] The drawing work was also carried out in parallel.[21]

The company that purchased the videogram and television rights to *Perfect Blue* before the film was completed advised the distributor to submit the film to the Fantasia International Film Festival in Montreal, Canada, so that it could be released overseas first.[26] Since it was his first film, director Kon was still unknown. Therefore, the distributor introduced the film as the first directorial effort of a disciple of Katsuhiro Otomo, the creator of *Akira*, which had already become a hit overseas.[26] Otomo is credited as a planning collaborator, but he never arranged for the company to ask Kon to direct the film, nor was he involved in the film. However, Otomo apparently once advised the original author about the circumstances of the animation industry when he was touting around the animation project.[23][24] At Fantasia, the film was so well received that a second screening was hurriedly arranged for those who could not see it, and it was eventually voted by the audience as the best international film.[31] This acclaim brought the distributor invitations from more than 50 film festivals, including Germany, Sweden, Australia, and South Korea.[31] The distributor began negotiations with distributors in various European countries and eventually succeeded in selling the film in major markets such as Spanish, French, Italian, English and German-speaking countries prior to its release in Japan.[31] The distributor was successful in obtaining permission from filmmakers Roger Corman and Irvin Kershner to use their comments in recommending the film free of charge worldwide. As a result, their comments were used on international theater flyers and in worldwide promotions.

Director Darren Aronofsky was rumored to have purchased the remake rights for *Perfect Blue*. However, when he spoke with Kon in a magazine in 2001, he stated that he had to abandon the purchase for various reasons.[22][32] His film *Requiem for a Dream* pays homage to *Perfect Blue* in some of its angles and shots.[22][32]

Release schedule [edit]

Perfect Blue premiered on August 5, 1997, at the Fantasia Film Festival in Montreal, Canada,[33] and had its general release in Japan on February 28, 1998.[34]

The film was also released on UMD by Anchor Bay Entertainment on December 6, 2005.[35] It featured the film in widescreen, leaving the film kept within black bars on the PSP's 16:9 screen. This release also contains no special features and only the English audio track. The film was released on Blu-ray and DVD in Region B by Anime Limited in 2013.[36][37] In the U.S., *Perfect Blue* aired on the Encore cable television network and was featured by the Sci Fi Channel on December 10, 2007, as part of its Ani-Monday block. In Australia, *Perfect Blue* aired on the SBS Television Network on April 12, 2008, and previously sometime in mid 2007 in a similar timeslot.

The film had a theatrical re-release in the United States by GKIDS on September 6 and 10, 2018, with both English dubbed and subtitled screenings.[38] GKIDS and Shout! Factory released the film on Blu-ray Disc in North America on March 26, 2019.[39] The film received a wide theatrical release in Finland in 2025.[40] GKIDS will screen a 4K restoration of the film in US theaters on October 3, 2025.[41][42]

Reception and legacy [edit]

The film was well received critically in the festival circuit, winning awards at the 1997 Fantasia Festival in Montréal, and Fantasporto Film Festival in Portugal.

Critical response in the United States upon its theatrical release was also positive.[43] As of June 2024, the film had an 84% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes based on 55 reviews, with an average score of 7.4/10. The consensus stated, "*Perfect Blue* is overstylized, but its core mystery is always compelling, as are the visual theatrics."[44] On Metacritic, the film has a score of 67 based on 17 reviews, indicating "generally favorable reviews".[45] *Time* included the film on its Top 5 Anime film list,[46] *Total Film* ranked *Perfect Blue* twenty-fifth on their list of greatest animated films,[47] and /Film named it the scariest animated film ever.[48] It also made the list for *Entertainment Weekly*'s best movies never seen from 1991 to 2011.[49] In 2022, *IndieWire* named *Perfect Blue* the twelfth best movie of the 1990s.[50]

Dennis Harvey of *Variety* wrote that while the film "ultimately disappoints with its just-middling tension and underdeveloped scenario, it still holds attention by trying something different for the genre".[5] Hoai-Tran Bui of */Film* called *Perfect Blue* "deeply violent, both physically and emotionally", writing that "this is a film that will leave you with profound psychological scars, and the feeling that you want to take a long, long shower".[48] Bob Graham of the *San Francisco Chronicle* noted the film's ability to "take the thriller, media fascination, psychological insight and pop culture and stand them all on their heads" via its "knowing, adult view of what seems to be a young-teenage paradise."[51] Writing for Anime News Network, reviewer Tim Henderson described the film as "a dark, sophisticated psychological thriller" with its effect of "over-obsession funneled through early Internet culture" and produces a "reminder of how much celebrity fandom has evolved in only a decade".[52] Reviewing the 2019 GKIDS Blu-ray release, Neil Lumbard of Blu-ray.com heralded *Perfect Blue* as "one of the greatest anime films of all time" and "a must-see masterpiece that helped to pave the way for more complex anime films to follow,"[53] while Chris Beveridge of *The Fandom Post* noted "this is not a film one can watch often overall, nor should you, but when you settle into it you put everything else away, turn down the lights, and savor an excellent piece of filmmaking."[54]

American performer Madonna incorporated clips from *Perfect Blue* into a remix of her song "What It Feels Like for a Girl" as a video interlude during her Drowned World Tour in 2001.[55][56]

American filmmaker Darren Aronofsky acknowledged the similarities in his 2010 film *Black Swan*, but denied that *Black Swan* was inspired by *Perfect Blue*; his previous film *Requiem for a Dream* features a remake of the bathtub scene from *Perfect Blue*.[57] A re-issued blog entry mentioned Aronofsky's film *Requiem for a Dream* as being among Kon's list of films he viewed for 2010.[58] In addition, Kon blogged about his meeting with Aronofsky in 2001.[59]

Other media [edit]

Seven Seas Entertainment obtained the English-language publication rights for the 1991 novel *Perfect Blue: Complete Metamorphosis* and the 1995 anthology (re-released in 2002 under the current title) *Perfect Blue: Awaken from a Dream* in April 2017. They released the translated novels in December 2017 and April 2018, respectively.[60]

See also [edit]

- List of films featuring fictional films
- *Black Swan*

Notes [edit]

1. ^ Reference to the quote is provided by Napier as: Jay, "Satoshi Kon", *Otaku* (May/June 2003):22

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- Official Geneon Entertainment website (in Japanese)
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- *Perfect Blue* (anime) at Anime News Network's encyclopedia
- *Perfect Blue* at IMDb
- *Perfect Blue* at Rotten Tomatoes
- *Perfect Blue* at Box Office Mojo

V · T · E **Works of Satoshi Kon** [show]
V · T · E **Madhouse theatrical features** [show]

Categories: 1997 films | 1990s Japanese-language films | 1990s Japanese films | 1997 in Japanese cinema | 1997 psychological thriller films | 1997 anime films | 1997 directorial debut films | Animated thriller films | Animated films based on Japanese novels | Anime films based on novels | Films about actors | Films about rape | Films about schizophrenia | Films about singers | Films about stalking | Films directed by Satoshi Kon | Japanese adult animated films | Japanese idols in anime and manga | Japanese nonlinear narrative films | Japanese serial killer films | Japanese psychological thriller films | Japanese police films | Films about crime | Films about murder | Films about criminals | Films about violence | Madhouse (company) | Magic realism films | Psychological thriller anime and manga | Foreign films set in the United States | Works about the music industry | Films produced by Masao Maruyama (film producer) | Japanese psychological horror films | Japanese horror films | 1990s horror films | 1997 horror films | 1990s psychological thriller films

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